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Russia's *Umma* and its Muftis¹

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Although Russia is traditionally associated with Orthodox Christianity it is historically a home for a substantial Islamic *umma* (community). In 1788 the enlightened but autocratic Russian tsarina Catherine the Great invented the institution of the muftiate as a medium of state control of her Muslim subjects. The decision was taken in the aftermath of the Pugachev popular revolt (1773–75) which almost brought Catherine's rule to an end. Active participants in the revolt included Muslim Tatars and Bashkirs from the Urals. At the same time, the muftiate was formed in anticipation of further Russian expansion eastwards, into adjacent Muslim-populated territories. By the end of the nineteenth century the Russian Empire incorporated predominantly Muslim Azerbaijan, the North Caucasus and Central Asia. The first Russian muftiate, the Ufa Spiritual Muhammedan Assembly (*Ufimskoye Dukhovnoye Magometanskogo Zakona Sobraniye*), was formed in the Urals, in Ufa. Between 1796 and 1802 it was based in Orenburg and was subsequently referred to as the Orenburg Muhammedan Spiritual Assembly (*Orenburgskoye Magometanskoye Dukhovnoye Sobraniye*). By 1913 there were 31 million Muslims, 26,279 mosques and 5339 Muslim clerics in the Russian Empire, including Bukhara and Khiva (Mir Islama, 1913).

The Bolsheviks, who came to power in 1917, demonstrated a surprising continuity with the *ancien régime* in their approach towards Russia's *umma*. Against a background of institutionalised atheism the Bolsheviks pursued a policy of control and accommodation of Islam rather than its complete eradication. They preserved the tsarist-era muftiate in Ufa, which from 1917 until 1948 was called the Central Spiritual Board (or Directorate) of Muslims of Inner Russia and Siberia (*Tsentral'noye Dukhovnoye Upravleniye Musul'man Vnutrennei Rossii i Sibiri*). (Between 1948 and 1994 it bore the name of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia (*Dukhovnoye Upravleniye Musul'man Yevropeiskoi Chasti SSSR i Sibiri* (DUMES)). In 1943, at the climax of the Second World War, the Stalin leadership created three more muftiates: the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (*Dukhovnoye Upravleniye Musul'man Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana* (SADUM)) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan; the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Transcaucasus (*Dukhovnoye Upravleniye Musul'man Zakavkaz'ya* (DUMZ)) in Baku, Azerbaijan; and the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the North Caucasus (*Dukhovnoye Upravleniye Musul'man Severnogo Kavkaza* (DUMSK)) in Buinaksk, later Makhachkala, Dagestan. These three muftiates were designed to tighten state control over Soviet Muslims who were regarded by German commanders as a potential fifth

column. Thus throughout the tsarist and Soviet periods muftiates proved to be effective tools of control and regulation of the Muslim minority by the state.

Paradoxically, the liberalisation under Gorbachev and the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet totalitarian state in 1991 were not followed by the dismantling of the muftiates. On the contrary, the existing four muftiates of the USSR have been superseded by dozens of new Islamic Spiritual Boards or muftiates, headed by 'young imams'. The breakup of the Soviet Union separated Russia's Muslims from their more numerous coreligionists in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia who overnight found themselves in the independent states of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan (Mirovaya, 2000, p. 122). The major Muslim enclaves of the postsoviet Russian Federation are situated in the Volga-Urals, the North Caucasus and Central Russia. Russian Muslims are concentrated in the eight autonomous republics of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Adygeia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachayevo-Cherkessia, Ingushetia, Dagestan and Chechnya. Most Muslims belong to the *Hanafi madhhab* (the juridical school) of Sunni Islam, although Dagestani and Chechen Muslims adhere to the *Shafii madhhab* of Sunni Islam. There is also a small Shia community in southern Dagestan. A large number of Dagestanis, Chechens and Ingush profess a mystical form of Islam – Sufism.² In Russia itself, with its population of 142 million, over 40 Islamic Spiritual Boards have emerged with jurisdiction over about 15 million Russian Muslims (Asadullin, 1999, p. 18).³ The new muftiates have challenged the Islamic monopoly of both of Russia's old muftiates, the DUMSK in Makhachkala and the DUMES in Ufa.

There have been obvious political, financial and personal reasons behind such an intensive multiplication of muftiates in postsoviet Russia, as in the Muslim regions of former Soviet Eurasia in general. The collapse of the communist ideology and Communist Party structures has created a fertile breeding-ground for the emergence of new leaders who claim to have had no part in collaboration with the Soviet state and the KGB. In the Islamic domain they have been represented by the 'young imams', who have championed the campaign for democratisation, devolution and rejuvenation of the old federal Islamic administrative system. The centrifugal drive of the 'young imams' in some of Russia's Muslim autonomous republics has been supported by the republican leaderships, which have regarded a muftiate as an important attribute of their increasing independence from Moscow.

An important financial underpinning of the mufti boom has been the flow of foreign Islamic assistance to Russia's Muslims which was triggered by Gorbachev's religious liberalisation in the late 1980s and which reached its peak in 1991–92. This foreign Islamic aid has been granted under the banner of *daawa* ('summons to Islam'). The main official provider of foreign Islamic assistance has been King Fahd of Saudi Arabia who has regularly subsidised an annual *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca and Medina for hundreds of Russia's Muslims. He has also sponsored dozens of scholarships to those who want to study in Islamic universities and colleges in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Libya, Kuwait, the UAE and Malaysia, and has subsidised free distribution of Qurans and other Islamic literature in various Islamic communities of Russia. Among other official benefactors have been the University of Imam Muhammad ben Saud; the Islamic Development Bank; the Organisation of Islamic Conference; the Islamic Fund for Cooperation; the World Islamic League, the World Association of Islamic Youth and the World Centre of Islamic Sciences of Iran.⁴ Non-official Islamic assistance has been even more impressive. It has been supplied by the Committee of Muslims of Asia of Kuwait; the Iranian World Organisation Madaris; the Islamic Charities of Al-Waqf-al-Islami; Taiba and Ibrahim

al-Ibrahim of Saudi Arabia; the International Islamic Charities of Ibrahim Hayri, Igatha and Zamzam; and the UAE Islamic Charity Organisation Al-Khairiyya. These funds have been used for the construction and staffing of mosques, *madrassahs* (Islamic secondary schools), Islamic universities and other Islam-related institutions, and have also been heavily invested in the work of Islamic missionaries and the organisation of various Islamic training camps and courses (Osmanov, 1999).

At first, in 1988–90, Mufti Talgat Tajutdinov⁵ of the DUMES and Mufti Makhmud Gekkiyev of the DUMSK were the main recipients and subsequent distributors of this lavish foreign Islamic assistance. The corruption which already existed in Islamic administrations intensified in the climate of late-Soviet and postsoviet economic disorder, and there was widespread fraud and mismanagement of the aid. According to some sources, during that period the muftis, especially Tajutdinov and his close associates, appropriated up to a quarter of the total assistance (NG-Religii, 2000; Osmanov, 1999). Their rapid and easy enrichment created a strong incentive for the 'young imams' to follow suit, the young Tatar imams, especially amongst the Kazan' and Siberian Tatars,⁶ being the most energetic and adventurous in this respect.

In spite of their striking diversity, Russia's new muftis form several identifiable categories. One is made up of muftis who are ethnically different from the Tatar-dominated majority. They are represented by the muftis of Russia's North Caucasus who belong to various ethnic groups of Caucasian, Persian and Turkic origin. The current muftis of the seven autonomous North Caucasian republics are: Enver Shumaf of Adygeia and Krasnodar *krai*; Akhmed Abdullayev of Dagestan; Mukhammad Albogachiyev of Ingushetia; Shafiq Pshikhachev of Kabardino-Balkaria; Ismail Berdiyev of Karachayevo-Cherkessia and Stavropol' *krai*; Jankhot Khakilayev of Northern Ossetia; and Akhmed Shamayev of Chechnya. These muftiates emerged between 1989 and 1992 on the wave of the 'parade of sovereignties'. To some extent their appearance was a by-product of political sovereignisation rather than the result of a premeditated and organised opposition to Mufti Gekkiyev of the DUMSK. However, the latter did not avoid the standard accusations of previous collaboration with the KGB and of moral laxity and corruption. In 1990 he was removed from office and charged with a criminal offence (Malashenko, 1998, p. 106).

Although the new muftis of the North Caucasus differ in terms of age and ideology from their Soviet predecessors, they have demonstrated a remarkable continuity with them in their political and doctrinal orientation. Most of the new muftis have been loyal to the existing republican authorities, which are largely inherited from Soviet times. They have also adhered to traditional or 'ethnic' Islam, which is incompatible with rapidly advancing Islamic fundamentalism, or 'Wahhabism' as it is called.⁷ The politicisation of the 'young imams' has been particularly intensive in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan because of the deeper religiosity of these republics and the impact of Islamised Chechen irredentism on the Islamic dynamic there. It is significant that in the early stages of the Russian-Chechen conflict the Chechen 'young imams' under the leadership of the first Chechen mufti Mukhammad Bashir, a representative of Sufi Islam of the Naqshbandi *tariqa* (order), distanced themselves from the radical Chechen nationalists of General Dudayev and adhered to a peaceful settlement of the conflict within the Russian political context. Similarly, Mufti Bashir's successors, Akhmed Kadyrov and Akhmed Shamayev, also representatives of Sufi Islam (of the Qadiri *tariqa*), denounced the extreme nationalist and Islamist opposition, headed by Shamil' Basayev, Salman Raduyev, Khunkar-pasha Israpilov, Movladi Udugov, Bagautdin Mukhammad and emir Khattab, who pushed for the secession of Chechnya and Dagestan from the Russian Federation and their

unification within an Islamic state (Put' Islama, 1997; Nezavisimaya, 1998). The political engagement of the Chechen muftis reached its peak in May 2000 when President Putin appointed Mufti Kadyrov as the head of the Chechen administration within the Russian Federation. The muftiate of Ingushetia under the leadership of Mufti Mukhammad Albogachiyev has been a loyal ally first of President Ruslan Aushev and later of President Murat Zyazikov (since April 2002).

In extremely multiethnic Dagestan the 'young imams', who are dominated by the representatives of traditional Sufi or tariqatist (belonging to the Sufi tariqa) Islam, have divided along ethnic lines. At first the leadership of the newly established autonomous muftiate, the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan (*Dukhovnoye Upravleniye Musul'man Dagestana* (DUMD)), was contested by 'young imams' from the largest ethnic groups, the Avars, Dargins, Kumyks and Laks. Between 1989 and 1992 the central strife occurred between the Avars, who dominated the Islamic officialdom in the Soviet period, and the rest. This major split was further exacerbated by internal conflicts. Initially, representatives of non-Avar ethnic groups took the lead in the race for the muftiate. In early 1989 Kumyks promoted their candidate Sheikh Mukhammad Mukhtar Babatov to the post of Dagestani mufti. Several months later Babatov was replaced by Abdulla Aligajiyev, a protégé of the Dargin *ulama* (clergy). In January 1990 Kumyks fought back: Bagauddin Isayev, a Kumyk, became the next mufti of Dagestan.

The religious supremacy of Kumyks and Dargins was shortlived, however. From late 1990 Avar 'young imams' intensified their campaign for the restoration of Avar domination in Dagestani Islamic officialdom. In February 1992 the Avar Muslim clerics succeeded in organising the 'election' of Sayid Akhmed Darbishgajiyev, an Avar, as the new mufti of Dagestan. However, the Avar profile of the DUMD alienated many non-Avar Dagestanis. Kumyks, Dargins and Laks refused to recognise the legitimacy of the DUMD and formed their own ethnic muftiates. The Nogai also undertook an unsuccessful attempt to create their own Islamic Board in Terekli-mekteb. In order to strengthen their claims to religious supremacy Avar tariqatists began to promote the Naqshbandi sheikh Sayid-efendi Chirkeyevsky, an Avar, to the rank of 'supreme sheikh of Dagestan' (Yemelianova, 1999, p. 619; Zargishiyev, 2000). The authority of the next Dagestani mufti, Magomed Darbishev, also an Avar, was based on Sheikh Sayid-efendi's blessing. Darbishev's successors Seyid Mukhammad Abubakarov (an Avar, 1996–98) and Akhmed-khaji Abdullayev (an Avar, 1998–) were also protégés of Sayid-efendi. During the period of their administration Sayid-efendi's *murids* (disciples), especially from Gumbet *raion*, the homeland of Sayid-efendi, were appointed to the top posts within the DUMD. In unofficial circles the DUMD started to be referred to as the 'Muftiate of Gumbet'. Among Sayid-efendi's other high-profile *murids* was, for example, Khas-mukhammad-khaji, the head of the Council of Dagestani Imams (*Sovet Imamov Dagestana*).

In 1994 Avar tariqatists finally realised their ambition: the Dagestani government recognised the DUMD as the only legitimate supreme Islamic authority in Dagestan. The rival Kumyk, Dargin and Lak muftiates were pronounced illegitimate and self-proclaimed. Sheikh Sayid-efendi's *wird* (a branch of the tariqa) of the Naqshbandiyya became the embodiment of mainstream traditional Islam in Dagestan. The *de facto* institutionalisation of sheikh Sayid-efendi as the official sheikh of Dagestan has been accompanied by his increasing influence in other spheres of public life. His followers and sympathisers have strengthened their presence in the political and economic structures of the republic. Sayid-efendi's approval has become crucial for many

Dagestani politicians and businessmen (Kurbanov, 1997). Among high-ranking supporters of the DUMD have been Mukhu Aliyev, the chairman of the National Assembly, Gaji Makhachev, the leader of the Avar national movement, and Surokat Asiyatilov, a parliamentary deputy and the leader of the Islamic Party of Dagestan (*Islamskaya Partiya Dagestana* (IPD)). On the other hand, official backing has allowed the DUMD and Sayid-efendi's close associates, in particular, to employ the state infrastructure, including the official mass media and the militia and intelligence services, to secure its domination.⁸ This has enabled the DUMD to unleash a propaganda campaign against their political and religious opponents, the 'Wahhabis' in particular.

On the whole, the agenda of the muftiates in all seven North Caucasian republics has been dominated by the Russian-Chechen conflict, the struggle against the proliferation of 'Wahhabism', and acute socioeconomic and ethnic problems. These preoccupations have curtailed their interest and activity outside their particular republics. Even this restricted activity has been directed more towards regional Islamic cooperation than towards pan-Islamic links within Russia. It is true that in the first half of the 1990s the North Caucasian muftis participated in the newly-established all-Russian Islamic organisations, such as the Higher Coordinating Centre of Spiritual Boards of Muslims of Russia (*Vysshi Koordinatsionny Tsentri Dukhovnykh Upravlenii Musul'man Rossii* (VKTs)) and the Council of Muftis of Russia (*Sovet Muftiyev Rossii* (SMR)), but this participation soon became purely symbolic. In August 1998 all the North Caucasian muftis withdrew from the VKTs and formed a separate Coordinating Centre of Spiritual Boards of Muslims of the North Caucasus (*Koordinatsionny Tsentri Dukhovnykh Upravlenii Musul'man Severnogo Kavkaza*), headed by Mufti Albogachiyev of Ingushetia (Informatsionny, 1998).

The rest of Russia's muftis are predominantly Tatars. In terms of status and geography they can be grouped into three distinct categories. The first comprises muftis of the autonomous areas of the Volga-Urals and Siberia: the muftis of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Buryatia, Chuvashia, Kalmykia, Khakassia, Komi, Mordovia, Sakha (Yakutia) and Udmurtia. The second comprises the muftis of the following Russian *oblasti* and *kraya*: Altai, Astrakhan', Chelyabinsk, Chita, Kamchatka, Kemerovo, Kurgan, Nizhni Novgorod, Omsk, Orenburg, Penza, Perm', Primor'ye, Rostov, Samara, Sverdlovsk, Tomsk, Tyumen', Ul'yanovsk, Vladivostok and Volgograd. The third comprises the muftis at all-Russian and supraregional level, like the mufti of All Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, the mufti of European Russia, the mufti of Asian Russia, the mufti of the Volga Region, the mufti of Siberia and the Far East and the mufti of St Petersburg and the North-Western part of Russia. These first two groups of muftiates represent the upgraded former provincial structures (*mukhtasibat*) of the DUMES, based in Ufa. The muftiates of the third group are all new inventions with the exception of the Soviet-era DUMES, which in 1994 was renamed the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russia and CIS (*Tsentrāl'noye Dukhovnoye Upravleniye Musul'man Rossii i SNG* (TsDUMR)).

Under the leadership of Talgat Tajutdinov the TsDUMR has maintained its special status. In spite of the emergence of many new muftiates, claiming their fair share of power, Mufti Tajutdinov has insisted on his monopoly right to administer the Muslims of Central Russia, Ukraine, Belarus', Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. According to the TsDUMR, in 1999 25 smaller Islamic Spiritual Boards and 2061 (out of a total of 5786) of Russia's Muslim communities were under its jurisdiction (Valeyev,

1999b). However, the monopoly of Talgat Tajutdinov has been crumbling under an intensive attack from the new Tatar muftis, most notable among whom have been the muftis Ravil Gainutdinov of European Russia,⁹ Nafigulla Ashirov of Asian Russia (until February 1999 mufti of Siberia and the Far East),¹⁰ and Mukaddas Bibarsov of the Volga Region.¹¹ In the past all of them had belonged to the inner circle of the Ufa mufti and they have used their intimate knowledge of Talgat's financial improprieties, especially related to foreign Islamic assistance, and of his illnesses, to undermine his centralised power and to promote their own ambitions.

This anti-Ufa campaign has been joined by two insiders, who are relatives of Mufti Tajutdinov: Tatarstan muftis Gabdulla Galiullin (until February 1998) and Gusman Iskhakov.¹² They have both accused Tajutdinov of corruption, excessive ecumenism, an antidemocratic style of work and schizophrenia. Tajutdinov was forced to obtain a medical certificate stating his mental adequacy (Malashenko, 1998, p. 123). The ambitions of the Tatarstan muftis who have sought control over all the Tatar Muslims of Russia have transcended republican borders. They have aspired to transfer the All-Russian Islamic administration from Ufa to Kazan'.¹³ In 1992 in Moscow the young Tatar imams formed a Higher Coordinating Centre of Spiritual Boards of Muslims of Russia (*Vysshi Koordinatsionny Tsentri Dukhovnykh Upravlenii Musul'man Rossii* (VKTs)) as an alternative to the DUMES. It was first headed by Gabdulla Galiullin and later by Mukaddas Bibarsov and Nafigulla Ashirov. However, the activity of the VKTs was soon paralysed by harsh internal rivalry amongst its creators. This resulted in the emergence in 1996, also in Moscow, of another Islamic superstructure: the Council of Muftis of Russia (*Sovet Muftiyev Rossii* (SMR)). The SMR has been permanently chaired by its principal organiser, the Moscow mufti Ravil Gainutdinov. Although the SMR claims to be an all-Russian Islamic forum it in fact represents the interests of the narrow Moscow-based Tatar Islamic elite under the leadership of Gainutdinov.

Since the mid-1990s Russia's Tatar Islamic establishment has been influenced by a new actor: the wealthy Tatar entrepreneur Rashid Bayazitov.¹⁴ He has generously sponsored the Islamic renaissance in Siberia and Central Russia; in particular, he has invested in the construction of mosques and madrassahs in Siberia. In 1994 he fully financed the construction in the Moscow district of Otradnoye of an impressive Centre for the Development of the Tatar Spiritual Heritage, named Hilal. Formally Bayazitov holds the post of chairman of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Siberia and the Far East (*Dukhovnoye Upravleniye Musul'man Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka*), based in Omsk and affiliated to the TsDUMR. The spiritual leaders of this muftiate are the Shakirdzyanov brothers. One is the actual mufti and the other is the imam of Novosibirsk. The muftiate of Bayazitov and Shakirdzyanov claims jurisdiction over the Muslims of the Novosibirsk, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, Tyumen' and Orenburg *oblasti* of Russian Siberia (Osmanov, 1999).

Although Bayazitov is a thoroughly secular person, he has gathered around himself an impressive group of highly-educated Islamic clergy and specialists in Islamic and Arabic studies. He adheres to the principles of unity between state and religion and since 1997 he and his supporters have defied the secessionism of the 'young imams' and have campaigned for the restoration of the Soviet-era Council for Religious Affairs at federal government level, or the formation of some similar institution as the central body coordinating and monitoring religious affairs in Russia. On a number of occasions representatives of Hilal have called for reconciliation between Ufa and Moscow and the administrative unification of Russia's Muslims (Osmanov, 2000). Bayazitov advocates exclusive reliance on Russian material and spiritual sources and

claims to have had no involvement with foreign Islamic funds. He opposes the activity of foreign Islamic missionaries in Russia and their local associates. He stresses his neutrality and distances himself both from the former Soviet and from the newly-emergent Islamic establishments. In practice, however, he has been close to Talgat Tajutdinov and aggressively intolerant of his opponents, particularly Gainutdinov, Ashirov and Abdel-Vakhid Niyazov,¹⁵ the head of the Islamic Cultural Centre (*Islamsky Kul'turny Tsent*r (IKTs)) and later leader of the political party *Refah* (Prosperity).¹⁶ They have been persistently attacked for alleged corruption and criminal connections (Tugran yak, 1999).

The situation in the higher Islamic circles of postsoviet Russia has been characterised, then, by the multiplication of muftiates and the subsequent formation of parallel organisational structures. This process has been accompanied by tough internal rivalries for administrative domination amongst three or four major centres of power.

One centre of power, represented by TsDUMR, has remained in Ufa. Since 1980 it has been headed by the mufti Talgat Tajutdinov who combines the titles of sheikh-ul-Islam and supreme mufti and chairman of the TsDUMR. He perceives all the other muftis in Russia as illegitimate and continues to nominate his representatives to the Muslim autonomous areas: Russia's regions as well as Ukraine, Belarus', Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Recently there has been a growing rapprochement between Tajutdinov and Bayazitov in spite of the latter's criticism of Tajutdinov's alleged lack of dynamism, poor administration and corruption. The alliance between them could create a viable counterbalance to their main opponent: Moscow mufti Ravil Gainutdinov.

Mufti Gainutdinov of European Russia represents the second and most dynamic of Russia's Islamic centres of power. It benefits from its location in Moscow, which enables its easier access to the Russian political and financial establishment. Gainutdinov has worked closely with the above-mentioned Ashirov and Niyazov. In spite of the alliance amongst the three, strengthened by their common opposition to Ufa, their relations have however not been free from internal rivalries. All three have sought religious domination, which would ensure monopoly access to domestic and foreign financial resources. By the beginning of 1999 Gainutdinov and Ashirov had outplayed Niyazov and pushed him out of the religious domain by 'dividing' Muslim Russia between themselves into its European and Asian halves. While Gainutdinov assumed the title of mufti of European Russia, Ashirov became mufti of Asian Russia with formal headquarters in Tobol'sk. In October 1999 Niyazov organised the *Refah* Party and made his debut in Russian politics. Like other postsoviet political parties, *Refah* represents and promotes the interests of its organisers. It unambiguously supports President Putin's policies, including that on Chechnya.

The third Islamic centre of power is in Kazan'. It is headed by Tatarstan mufti Gusman Iskhakov,¹⁷ who was 'elected' at the unifying Islamic Congress organised by the Tatarstan authorities in February 1998. With the backing of President Shaimiyev, Mufti Iskhakov has introduced new registration rules for the Islamic communities on the territory of Tatarstan, and these have allowed him to impose his jurisdiction over the formerly Ufa-related mukhtasibats and Islamic communities. He has also attempted to position his nominees in various regions of the Volga-Urals, that is, within the borders of the mythological Idel-Ural.¹⁸ It is significant that in spite of the common anti-Ufa orientation of Iskhakov and Gainutdinov the former has distanced himself from the latter. He has not hurried to express his loyalty to Gainutdinov or to reconfirm his membership of the Council of Muftis of Russia (Iskhakov, 1998).

The parallel existence of various Islamic administrations has contributed to confusion and double-registration at the level of local Islamic communities. As a result, in some places several parallel Spiritual Boards and mukhtasibats have emerged. Thus in Tatarstan there are *de facto* two Islamic Spiritual Boards in operation at the moment. One is under Iskhakov and the other, headed by Farid Salman, is affiliated to Ufa. There is a similar situation in Bashkortostan where the TsDUMR under Tajutdinov coexists with the muftiate of Bashkortostan under the leadership of Mufti Nurmukhammed Nigmatullin. In Asian Russia some Spiritual Boards are affiliated to the muftiate under Ashirov, others to the muftiate of Siberia and the Far East under Mufti Shakirdzyanov and yet others to the TsDUMR under Tajutdinov. Some of these local Islamic Spiritual Boards are registered with all three muftiates while others, like the Islamic Spiritual Board under Bikmullin in Tyumen', remain independent. In Orenburg *oblast'* in the Urals there are two parallel Islamic Spiritual Boards: one in the city of Orenburg and the other in the small town of Buguruslan. The Orenburg Spiritual Board, which is headed by Khairullin, is under the jurisdiction of the TsDUMR, while the Buguruslan Spiritual Board under the leadership of Shangareyev is affiliated to the SMR under Gainutdinov (Vestnik, 2000, pp. 59–85). Furthermore, various muftiates provide conflicting information on the number of Islamic communities that they administer. For example, Tajutdinov claims control over 470 Islamic communities in Tatarstan, while Tatarstan mufti Iskhakov insists that all 1200 Islamic communities of Tatarstan are registered with his muftiate (Tajutdinov, 1999; Iskhakov, 1999). The situation is further complicated as a result of the introduction by different muftiates of various Islamic calendars, which has created confusion among ordinary Muslims even about the dates of the major Islamic events.

Russia's Tatar muftis vary considerably in their political orientation and the degree of their political engagement. During Yel'tsin's presidency (1991–99) Tajutdinov maintained his institutionalised status as the 'court mufti'. Alongside Patriarch Aleksii he was integrated within the Yel'tsin political establishment. Similarly, a special relationship has been forged between Tajutdinov and the politically influential businessman Boris Berezovsky (Valeyev, 1999a). In terms of political orientation, Tajutdinov is a *gosudarstvennik* (in favour of a strong and indivisible Russian state). Tajutdinov's ally Rashid Bayazitov has demonstrated consistent sympathy towards the Russian military and patriotic forces. Thus in 1994 he formed the patriotic political party *Za Derzhavu* (For the Great State) and established relations with General Lebed' and Sergei Baburin. It is perhaps significant that the executive director of the Hilal Centre, Rifat Osmanov, is a graduate of the Moscow Institute of Military Interpreters, an officer of the Russian army with extensive war experience in the Middle East.¹⁹

The Moscow mufti, Gainutdinov, has established his own special relationship with the powerful Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov.²⁰ Luzhkov's political and financial assistance has enhanced Gainutdinov's ambition to turn Moscow into the Islamic capital of Russia. Gainutdinov further strengthened his position in Russian Islamic and indeed non-Islamic politics as a result of the parliamentary elections in December 1999, which brought Abdel-Vakhid Niyazov and some of Gainutdinov's other associates into the Russian Duma.

The election of Vladimir Putin as Russian president in March 2000 has intensified the struggle between Tajutdinov and Gainutdinov for the role of the 'court' mufti of Russia. Tajutdinov's party, for example, has contributed to the removal from office of Andrei Loginov, who was the head of the Department of Internal Politics (*Departa-*

ment *Vnutrennei Politiki*) of the Presidential Administration and the powerful patron of Gainutdinov. However, the latter has gained as a result of the promotion of Farid Mukhametshin, a supporter of Gainutdinov, to the post of head of the Department of Social and Religious Formations (*Departament Obshchestvennykh i Religioznykh Ob'yedinenii*) of the Russian Government (Osmanov, 2000). In March 2000 Gainutdinov scored a significant victory over Tajutdinov. He established his control over the second-largest mosque in Moscow, the Historical Mosque (*Istoricheskaya mechet*'), which used to be under the jurisdiction of the TsDUMR.

As already noted, the Kazan' mufti Gusman Iskhakov has relied on the support of President Shaimiyev; an important factor in their relationship has been the considerable influence of Iskhakov's mother Rashida Abystai over Sakina Shaimiyeva, the president's wife. By 2000 Iskhakov was fully integrated within the ruling regime of President Shaimiyev (Yemelianova, 2000). As for Mufti Ashirov of Asian Russia and Abdel-Vakhid Niyazov, the leader of *Refah*, they have been notoriously unscrupulous in their political engagements, which have been directly related to anticipated financial gains. For example, for some time they collaborated with the leader of the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR), Nadyrshakh Khachilayev. Ashirov and Niyazov supported Khachilayev's efforts to organise an Islamic political party, *Jamaat*, which would seek Dagestan's secession from Russia. Their collaboration ended in May 1998 as a result of Khachilayev's participation in the storming of the Dagestani parliament under the banner of Islam.²¹ According to some informants, both Ashirov and Niyazov have been involved with the Tyumen' and the Uralmash criminal groupings (the latter named after the car manufacturer Uralmash). They have also been known for their links with the *Refah* party of Turkey, the Islamic movement in Yemen, the Islamic Renaissance Party and *Hamas* in Algeria and the *Jamaat Polami* party in Pakistan. They have been widely accused of the unauthorised use of the names of some high-ranking Russian and foreign politicians for their own purposes.²²

The evidence suggests that most of Russia's new muftis, especially in Central Russia, the Volga-Urals and Siberia, can be seen as Islamic manifestations of a characteristic postsoviet phenomenon, the rise of the 'new Russians'. They have exploited the breakup of the Soviet system for their personal political and economic advantage. In doing so they have been aloof from the interests of state and society, which they have exploited rhetorically only for populist reasons. The mufti boom in Russia has occurred in isolation from the grassroots Islamic communities. Village imams, who constitute about 90 per cent of the Muslim clergy in Russia, have deplored the lack of attention and practical help, and the absence of spiritual guidance, from the muftiates. From below the muftis are seen as self-obsessed, over-materialistic, corrupt and theologically incompetent (Ayrat, 1999; Nazipov, 1999; Khashem, 1998; Abukkerim, 1998).

Notes

- ¹ This article is based on the findings of ESRC-funded projects on 'Islam, ethnicity and nationalism in the postsoviet Russian Federation' (1997–99) and 'Ethnicity, politics and transnational Islam: a study of an international Sufi order' (1998–2001) and of a Leverhulme Trust-funded project on 'Islam and ethnic politics in the North Caucasus' (2000–03). In shorter form parts of this article were published as 'New muftis, new Russians?' in *Prism*, a monthly journal on the postsoviet states published by the Jamestown Foundation, Washington DC, 15, part 4, 1999.
- ² Scholars are divided over the origins of the term *sufism*, or *al-tasawwuf*. Some derive it

from the Arab word *safawa* (to be pure); some from the Greek word *sophia* (wisdom); yet others from the Arab word *suf* (coarse wool) from which the gown of an ascetic hermit was made. Sufism represents the mystical side of Islam. It developed parallel to mainstream Islam. The Sufis believe that Sufism is a higher form of Islam. By the end of the twelfth century there emerged specifically Sufi sheikhs. By the fourteenth century twelve major tariqas had been formed: Rifaiyya, Yasawiyya, Shadhiliyya, Suhrawardiyya, Chistiyya, Kubrawiyya, Badaviyya, Qadiriyya, Mawlaiyya, Bektashiyya, Khalwatiyya and Naqshbandiyya. For more information see: Trimmingham, 1973; Naqshbandis, 1999; Al-Janabi, 2000.

- ³ According to the Hilal Centre (Moscow) there were 1151 registered Islamic institutions at the level of Islamic Spiritual Board in Russia in 1999 (Osmanov, 1999).
- ⁴ Author's interviews with a number of Russian muftis, 1997–2000.
- ⁵ Mufti Talgat Tajutdinov, a Kazan' Tatar, was born in 1948 in Kazan'. He received his Islamic education at the Mir-Arab madrassah in Bukhara, and at the prestigious Islamic University Al-Azhar in Cairo. He has a high level of Islamic knowledge and religious culture and enjoys considerable popular respect in the Muslim communities of Russia.
- ⁶ Russia's Tatars are divided into several ethno-regional subgroups, including Kazan' Tatars, Misharis, Siberian Tatars, Astrakhan' Tatars, Kasim Tatars, Sergachev Tatars and Kryashens.
- ⁷ Wahhabism originated in the mid-eighteenth century in Arabia and was named after its leader Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab. Doctrinally Wahhabis claim to represent the 'true' Islam of the Prophet and the four righteous caliphs, advocating *tawhhid* (strict monotheism) and insisting on the necessity of observing the five *arkan* (basics) of Islam. They oppose Sufism as a deviation from 'true Islam' and recognise the special role of *jihad* (holy war), often attaching a military dimension to it. More generally, in postsoviet Eurasia the term is often applied to any opponent of Islamic traditionalism, as well as to those who exploit Islamic symbols for particular goals, usually of an irredentist nature.
- ⁸ In spite of close collaboration between the DUMD and the Dagestani authorities, relations between them have not been trouble-free. For example, in 1997–98 the DUMD bitterly criticised the government for slowing down the Islamisation project promoted by the DUMD, and for 'insufficient' hostility towards Wahhabis (The Makhachkala newspaper *As-Salam*, 23 December 1997).
- ⁹ Mufti Ravil Gainutdinov, a Kazan' Tatar, was born in 1959 in Kazan'. He studied at the Theatrical Institute and is often referred to as an '*artist*' (actor) by other members of Russian Islamic officialdom. In the 1980s he studied at the Mir-Arab madrassah in Bukhara. In 1985–87 he was the personal secretary of Mufti Tajutdinov.
- ¹⁰ Mufti Nafigulla Ashirov, a Siberian Tatar, was born in 1954 in Tobol'sk. In the 1970s he spent five years in prison, charged with burglary and hooliganism, a fact that has led to his nickname of 'bandit'. In the 1980s he reformed and studied at the Mir-Arab madrassah in Bukhara and in the Islamic Institute in Algeria. Since then he has established links with Algerian Islamists. There he married his second wife who is Algerian. In 1991–92 he was a deputy of Mufti Tajutdinov.
- ¹¹ Mufti Mukaddas Bibarsov, a Siberian Tatar, was born in 1960 in Penza *oblast'*. In 1985 he graduated from the madrassah in Ufa. He was taught by Tajutdinov. Since 1987 he has been *imam-khatyb* of Saratov mosque and since 1994 mufti of the Volga region.
- ¹² Talgat Tajutdinov, Gabdulla Galiullin and Gusman Iskhakov are all related to Rashida Abystai, an influential spiritual teacher and representative of one of the most respected Tatar Islamic dynasties, which originated in 1886 in the village of Sary Kurlai in Arsk *raion* in Tatarstan. Iskhakov is her son and Tajutdinov and Galiullin are married to her daughters.
- ¹³ The Kazan' muftis' territorial ambitions have been welcomed by the All-Tatar Public Centre (*Vsetatarsky Obshchestvenny Tsent*r (VTOTs)), the Milli Mejlis (National Assembly) and the *Itifaq* Party. The latter in fact initiated this idea in 1990. The Shaimiyev government has also indirectly supported the project (Khaplekhaitov, 1998).

- ¹⁴ Rashid Bayazitov was born in Nizhni Novgorod into a poor family of nine children. He has a PhD in economics and the honorary title of academician of a number of Academies, including the International Slavic Academy of Sciences and New York Academy. He has made a fortune as a result of a successful construction business.
- ¹⁵ Abdel-Vakhid Niyazov (formerly Vadim Medvedev), a Tatar, was born in 1970 in Omsk. He does not have religious or any other higher education. Like Ashirov he has a criminal record. In the late 1980s he converted to Islam and adopted an Islamic name.
- ¹⁶ The *Refah* party was created in October 1999 for the forthcoming parliamentary elections. During the elections in December 1999 *Refah* joined the pro-Putin block *Yedinstvo*, a move which secured Niyazov and his close associates twelve seats in the Russian State Duma.
- ¹⁷ Mufti Gusman Iskhakov, a Kazan' Tatar, studied at the Mir-Arab madrassah in Bukhara and at the Islamic Institute in Libya. In 1992–98 he was a deputy of the Tatarstan mufti Galiullin.
- ¹⁸ In the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 the Tatar nationalists proclaimed a shortlived Islamo-Turkic state called Idel-Ural, covering the territory of modern-day Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, much of Orenburg *oblast'* and the territories extending south to the Caspian Sea.
- ¹⁹ While Tajutdinov espouses ecumenism, the political views of Bayazitov and his supporters are characterised by overt antisemitism (Osmanov, 2000).
- ²⁰ In 1997 Luzhkov funded the construction of a mosque at Poklonnaya Gora in Moscow. During the 1990s he also regularly hosted international Islamic gatherings in Moscow, initiated by Mufti Gainutdinov.
- ²¹ On 20–21 May 1998 Nadyrshakh Khachilayev, his brother Magomed Khachilayev (the leader of the Lak national movement) and Gaji Makhachev (the leader of the Avar nationalist movement) organised the seizure of the parliament building in Makhachkala and installed the green banner of Islam over it. Since then Nadyrshakh Khachilayev has been under state persecution for political extremism.
- ²² In 1998 the governments of many Arab states decided to curtail any contacts with Ashirov and Niyazov. (A copy of a secret protocol of the meeting of the ambassadors of the Arab states in Moscow, 4 June 1998; interviews with a prominent representative of the Moscow Islamic establishment who did not want to be named, April 1999, Moscow.)

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